

Central Church
804 Washington Street,
west side between Centre
and Winter Streets
Bath
Sagadahoc County
Maine

HABS No. ME-148

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

CENTRAL CHURCH

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Location: 804 Washington Street, west side of street, Bath,
Sagadahoc County, Maine

Present Owner
and Occupant: United Church of Christ (Congregational) of Bath

Present Use: As a church and parish house

Statement of
Significance: Arthur Gilman designed this wooden Gothic church in
1846; it has a cathedral-like interior detailed in
wood, and stained glass windows.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1846-47.
2. Architect: Arthur Gilman, of Boston.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an in-
complete chain of title. Sagadahoc County Registry of
Deeds.

1959 Deed. September 17, 1959, recorded September 18, 1959 in
Book 308 page 413

The Third Parish in Bath (a corporation organized and
existing by virtue of Chapter 602, Laws of 1835)
to
Central Congregational Church of Bath

1965 Agreement of Consolidation. August 4, 1965, recorded
October 1, 1965 in

Book 344 page 585

Central Congregational Church of Bath and Winter
Street Congregational Church (United Church of
Christ)

unite to become
United Church of Christ (Congregational) of Bath

4. Builder: Isaiah Coombs, of Bath.
5. Alterations and additions: In 1861 the octagonal wooden
spire which completed the church steeple was lost; it was
never replaced. Between 1882 and 1923 a two-and-a-half

story rectangular wooden parish house was built to the south of the church. It was designed by architects George Edward Harding and E. Gooch of New York. Between 1882 and 1923 slight alterations were made to the entrance vestibule and the choir gallery on the interior of the church. They were designed by architect R. C. Spencer, Jr., of Chicago. Before 1914 the stained glass window over the altar was replaced by the organ; the window was inserted in the wall dividing the vestibule from the sanctuary.

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B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Several prominent Bath shipping families were members of this church.

C. Supplemental Material:

Arthur Gilman (1821-1882) began his architectural practice in Boston in 1845. The Central Church was one of his first commissions. He designed St. Paul's Church in Dedham, Massachusetts, and the State House in Concord, New Hampshire. In Boston he designed the Arlington Street Church, the New City Hall, the Horticultural Society Hall, and the Eastern Railroad Station; he designed several private residences in the suburbs. From 1853-54, Mr. Gilman made an intensive tour of English and French cathedrals. He was involved in plans for the filling in of Back Bay, carried out in 1857. In 1865, Mr. Gilman removed his practice to New York, where he designed the Equitable Life Assurance Society Building.

D. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: A line engraving from an 1851 map of Bath shows the church complete with spire; a copy of the map is located at the Bath Marine Museum, Bath, Maine.

There are several architectural drawings in the possession of the United Church of Christ (Congregational) of Bath and of the Bath Marine Museum, Bath, Maine.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deeds. Sagadahoc County Registry of Deeds, 752 High Street, Bath, Maine 04530.

Records of the Central Church 1835-1849, 1850-1881, 1882-1923, in the collection of the Bath Marine Museum, Bath, Maine.

b. Secondary and published sources:

The Bath Independent, Bath, Maine, February 14, 1914.

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Portland Advertiser (Portland, Maine), June 26, 1846.

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Sketches of Men of Mark. New York: New York and
Hartford Publishing Company, 1871, pp. 817-21.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A square tower forms the main entrance to this two-and-a-half-story wooden church, standing in front of the gable end of the rectangular building. A separate two-and-a-half-story wooden rectangular parish house stands nearby, to the south.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The main body of the church is about 47 feet wide and 88 feet deep; the tower is about 18 feet square. The parish house is about 35 feet wide and 60 feet deep.
2. Foundations: The church has granite foundations. The parish house has concrete foundations.
3. Wall construction: Wood with wooden trim, both buildings.
4. Trim and finish: Church. The church has a three-bay facade. The center bay is formed by the tower; to either side is a single arched window with a horizontal string-course at its base. At each corner is a square pilaster, set on a diagonal to the corner. The pilasters are constructed of matched boards. The outer face slopes diagonally out at the midpoint, creating a thicker base to the pilaster, as if it were buttressed. At the roof line the pilaster has a pointed hood; above is a short square column with pointed hoods at the top of each face, surmounted by a round spire and ball ornament. Identical pilasters occur at the rear corners of the church. Arched windows identical to the two facade windows run continuously along either side of the church. They are separated into bays by flat pilasters; each bay has a horizontal string-course at the base of the window. A short three-bay

extension almost the full width of the church projects from the rear. The center bay is two stories high with a gable roof. The side bays are one story high with shed roofs sloping out from the center bay; each contains a single arched window. All the wall surfaces of the church are vertical board and batten. A wide slightly projecting band made up of horizontal matched boards rings the entire church above the foundations, forming a base.

Tower. The church tower has three stages. The facade face of the first stage contains a large arched window above an arched doorway. The side faces have smaller arched windows with horizontal stringcourses. The second stage, delineated top and bottom by single stringcourses, has a very small arched window in each face. Each face of the third stage, a belfry, is divided in half by a flat pilaster; in each half is a tall arched window containing horizontal louvers, with carved trefoil designs in the arch. At each corner of the tower, running the full height, are two matched board pilasters, projecting at right angles to each other. These pilasters are detailed in the same way as those on the church. They slope out in three stages, each time projecting farther out, becoming quite rectangular at their bases. The pilasters terminate above the third stage of the tower in pointed hoods; each is surmounted by a short round column topped by a round spire and ball ornament. Above the molded stringcourse which forms the top of the third stage of the tower, is a short segment of wall with a jagged upper edge, suggesting a Medieval turret. At the midpoint of each wall, above each third-stage center pilaster, stands a square hooded column with a round spire, identical to those on the corner pilasters of the church. All the wall surfaces of the tower are vertical board and batten.

Parish house. The parish house has a three-bay facade, broken at each floor level by a horizontal stringcourse. The center bay contains an arched doorway on the first floor, a double pointed arched window on the second floor, and an identical window on the third floor in the gable. The bay to either side contains a double round arched window on the first floor, and a single pointed arched window on the second floor. At the second-floor level the bays are separated by flat pilasters, which terminate in triangular hoods at the third-floor level. At either corner of the parish-house facade, a pair of flat pilasters, projecting at right angles to each other, terminate in triangular hoods at the roof line. The wall surface of the facade is vertical board and batten. The windows are randomly placed along the sides of the house. The side and rear walls are clapboarded.

5. Chimneys: Church. There is one simple brick chimney, located on the southern half of the rear wall, interior to the extension.

Parish house. One simple brick chimney, located on the exterior of the southern side wall.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Church. The main door to the church is recessed in a pointed arched opening in the facade of the tower. The double wooden door, vertical board and bead, has elaborate cast-iron strap hinges. A modern sloping roof has been added over the doorway between the tower pilasters. In the second bay on the north side of the church, there is a second doorway in the one-story, gable-roofed extension. A pointed arched wooden door with a vertical board and bead surface and elaborate cast-iron strap hinges is set in a recessed, pointed arched opening. The gable has a carved bargeboard. An arched wooden door of vertical boarding is set in an arched opening in the second bay of the south side of the church and in the north wall of the extension.

Parish house. The door to the parish house is rectangular, finished with vertical matched boards; it has elaborate strap hinges. A thick round molding forms a slightly pointed arch above it; in the arch is a vertical matched board panel with a single round window in the center.

- b. Windows: Church. All the windows of the church are detailed in the same way, no matter what their size. Each is made of geometrically patterned stained glass in a shape which indents slightly before it arches to a point at the top, creating a trefoil shape. Each is set in a pointed arched recess with a pointed-arch hood formed by a projecting molding. The largest windows have a section which hinges at the bottom.

Parish house. The facade windows of the parish house are hinged, single light. They are set in slightly recessed pointed-arched openings with pointed-arch hoods identical to those of the church. The side wall windows are rectangular casements with narrow vertical lights. They are surrounded by flat moldings.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Church. The gable roof has two slopes: it is steeply pitched for the upper two-thirds of its length, then breaks to a lesser pitch for the lower portion. The rear extension has a gable roof and two shed roofs. All are shingled in asphalt.

Parish house. The gable roof is shingled in asphalt.

- b. Cornice: Church. The church has a narrow, flat cornice with a bottom molded band against which the battens butt and a middle molded band. The cornice wraps around the edge of the roof on the facade and at the rear; it is capped by a flat board raised slightly above the roof. A narrow molded band forms the cornice of the rear extension; the battens butt directly against it.

Parish house. The facade of the parish house has a flat two-layered cornice with a molded upper band. The facade extends up in front of the actual roof; its shape echoes that of the church, but it has a flat segment in the center surmounted by a flat cap with projecting molding. The battens are joined into arches below the cornice. The sides and rear of the parish house have a flat cornice with a molding band in the middle and a molded band above.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Church. The church is one space beyond the entry vestibule of the tower. A central nave is flanked by side aisles with balconies. Two rows of pews face a raised platform. Behind the rear sanctuary wall, to either side of the organ recess, are two small anterooms.

Parish house. The first floor is one large open meeting hall. The second floor is divided into rooms of varying sizes.

2. Stairways: Church. The galleries are reached by stairs at either front corner of the church. There is a stair to the upper stages of the tower on the facade wall of the tower.

Parish house. A stair to the second floor is located in the southeastern corner.

3. Flooring: The floors of the church are carpeted. The parish house has hardwood floors.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster in both the church and the parish house.

5. Doors: Church. The double entrance door and side doors have vertical board and bead paneling, stained dark. Wooden doors lead from the sanctuary to the ante rooms.

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Parish house. Wooden doors.

6. Trim: Church. The extensive wooden trim in the church is stained dark and varnished. The open arched trusses which support the roof are exposed; each vertical member terminates below in a turned pendant. Octagonal columns with heavy molded pointed arches separate the side aisles from the nave. Between the columns runs the solid balustrade of the galleries: inward curved moldings form a blind arcade of pointed arches below a heavily molded handrail. Two rows of pews, which extend from a center aisle to aisles along the outside wall under the galleries, face the altar. The end of each pew is formed by two octagonal columns with a single pointed arch, similar to those which decorate the gallery balustrade, between them. The organ is contained in a molded arched recess at the altar end of the church; it has a paneled base and side pilasters. In front of it is a raised platform. A balustrade identical to that of the gallery extends across the width of the nave, enclosing a choir area. Originally this balustrade was suspended in front of the arched recess, a few feet above the raised platform. It was altered after 1914. Standing on the platform in front of the balustrade is the lectern, detailed with two recessed trefoil arches and pilasters with recessed trefoil panels. Movable furniture for the altar area includes a high-backed bench, two high-backed chairs, and an altar table; all are similarly carved in a trefoil and quatrefoil lattice work. A molded string-course rings the church at the base of the windows. Each window has a pointed hood of similar molding.

Parish house. Varnished wooden trim.

7. Lighting: Electric.
8. Hardware: The north side door of the church has cast-iron strap hinges on the interior.

D. Site:

The lot on which the church and parish house stand is simply landscaped with evergreens.

Prepared by Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr.
and
Mary-Eliza Wengren
September 1971

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during 1971 and 1972 in the course of a photo-data project in the cities of Bath, Hallowell, Monmouth, and Richmond in the State of Maine. The project was arranged in response to the initiative of Mrs. Linda B. Clark of Row House, Inc., in Hallowell, Dr. Charles E. Burden of the Bath Marine Museum, Mrs. Paul L. Roberts of the Richmond Historical and Cultural Society, and Mr. H. Earle Flanders of Monmouth. All of these preservationists actively solicited or contributed funds and effectively fostered increased interest in the architectural heritage of their respective communities. The project was under the general direction of James C. Massey, at that time Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey; was supervised in the field by Denys Peter Myers, then Principal Architectural Historian of HABS; was carried on by Student Architectural Historian Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Boston University; and was continued by Alan Mast, Maine Arts and Humanities Commission, and Mary-Eliza Wengren (Mrs. Richard E., Jr.), Maine Historic Preservation Commission, under the field supervision of Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr. Photographers were Mark C. Bisgrove, Sylvester Cobbs, Stanley Schwartz, Leon P. Shepard, and Richard Dwight Sturgis.